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THE ETHNOLOGY OF MALTA AND GOZO.

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[The figures in brackets in the text refer to Appendix I, Literature.]

I.—Introduction.

This report refers to a part of the material collected in December, 1920, and January, 1921, by an anthropological expedition from Oxford. The expedition was made possible by the generosity of Sir Alfred Mond and a grant from the Mary Ewart Trust. Most of the measurements on crania, on the women, and on about a hundred men and women at Gozo, were done by Mrs. Jenkinson and Miss Mosa working together. Miss Russell measured long bones and about half the children.[1] The remaining measurements were done by the present writer. As far as possible all the skeletal material was examined by the present writer, who is ultimately responsible for the sexing. Mr. Hort was occupied in working at the archæological problems. I am indebted to Mrs. Jenkinson and Miss Mosa for working out a number of indices on the living, and to Miss Russell for help in tabulation.

We all wish to express our thanks to the Governor of Malta (Field-Marshal Lord Plumer), who gave us official support, took a great personal interest in our work, and smoothed away many of the difficulties; and to the Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Robertson. Dr. Zammit, the Rector of Malta University and Curator of the Museum, set his unrivalled knowledge of the island at our disposal, and gave us every possible help. Our thanks are also due to various members of the Department of Public Health, who sacrificed busy days in order to take us into villages where they happened to be known; to Count Caruana Gatto, for instructing me in the botany of Malta; and to numerous other friends who did everything in their power to enable us to collect data in Malta.

[1] It is hoped to utilise the material dealing with the long bones and with the children in subsequent papers.

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In Oxford Professor Arthur Thomson has set the resources of his Department, including a calculating machine, at my disposal, and has helped me continually with advice and kindly criticism. My former teachers—Sir Arthur Evans, Mr. Henry Balfour, Mr. E. T. Leeds, and Professor J. L. Myres—have accorded me in many conversations the combined privileges of a colleague and a pupil. I fear that I have, albeit unwittingly, often pirated their ideas. My colleague, Miss Blackwood, has devoted the greater part of a Long Vacation to helping to finish and prepare this paper for the press before my leaving England, and has performed the laborious task of looking over proofs in my absence.

II.—Geography.

The Maltese archipelago consists of the islands of Malta, Gozo, Comino, Cominetto and Filfola. The two latter are uninhabited, and Comino is practically untenanted. We are therefore only concerned with the islands of Malta and Gozo.

Malta lies about 60 miles south of Sicily and 180 miles north of the African coast. Its maximum length is 18½ miles, its maximum breadth 8½ miles, and its area 95 square miles. Gozo is considerably smaller, and has an area of about 20 square miles.

Geologically, the islands are Late Eocene (3). The eastern and most thickly inhabited part of Malta consists of globigerina limestone, which overlies lower coralline limestone; in the western part these beds are covered with beds of greensand and blue clay or marl, over which lies the upper coralline limestone. The rock is everywhere extremely friable, and is perpetually disintegrating under the influence of wind and rain. Except in one or two places the soil is seldom more than a few inches deep.

The surrounding seas are warm and shallow; a rise of 50 fathoms would connect Malta and Sicily, and a rise of 200 fathoms would join North Africa and Europe and include Malta as a craggy bastion. The shallowest sea, however, lies more to the west. Malta should, therefore, be more correctly described as an outlying pier of an old land bridge rather than part of the land bridge itself. It seems probable that slow, tectonic movements are actually in progress to-day, and that the archipelago is sinking; but it is extremely unlikely that any men of whom we possess traces at present, with the doubtful exception of a few fragments from the Weid Dalam, came to Malta when it was still part of the mainland.

The island is tilted from south to north. The cliffs along the southern coast are high and precipitous, and some of the loftiest parts of the island are close to the shore.

The undercliff here forms a pleasant contrast to the less fertile parts of Malta. Carib trees are not uncommon, potatoes are cultivated on terraces, and the tiny fields are irrigated, as elsewhere in Malta, by little runlets conducted along channels

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PREFACE

(1) TERMS OF REFERENCE

114 121 On October 1st, 1956, the writer became Junior Research Fellow in the Department of Geography in the Durham Division of the University of Durham, an appointment sponsored by the Research Department of the Colonial Office. The terms of the appointment, which was to be tenable for two years, entailed research into the social factors behind the problems of rural Malta and Gozo - especially as these concern the large agricultural element in this population (Project C.D.W. (R) No. 764).

The report here submitted presents the writer's assessment of the position.

114 [101] The sixteen months between January, 1957, and May, 1958, were spent in the Maltese Islands, the remainder of the period being spent in the Department in Durham on the analysis and preparation of material amassed in the field.

(2) ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

122 The writer wishes to record his gratitude for the help and encouragement received within both official and private circles in Malta and Gozo. During the period of work in the Islands, in 1957-58, the Maltese Government provided extensive help both to him and to a colleague, Mr. Peter K. Mitchell. This took the form of:

(a) the use of official transport for research purposes on two or three days each week throughout the period in the Islands,

(b) the provision of an interpreter for a large part of the time during which transport was also available,

(c) permission to use the facilities of certain Government Departments and other premises - on the customary Civil Service oath,

000 (d) a grant to cover certain travel expenses.

The Governor of Malta, His Excellency Sir Robert Laycock, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., and the Lieutenant-Governor, His Honour Mr. Trafford Smith, C.M.G., both showed gracious interest in the work in Malta.

General acknowledgement of other assistance given to the writer in Malta must, for reasons of space, be confined here to a few of a very long list of individuals. A very special mention must, however, be made in one case, for the writer wishes to place on record his debt to Mr. and Mrs. P.K. Mitchell for the help and friendship extended to him throughout the stay in Malta.

Profound thanks are due also to the farmers whose patience and generosity made field work among them possible and profitable. As their help and information was given in confidence individual identities have had to be obscured.

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the "tempestuous wind called Euroclydon" that still whistles across it during the winter months under its modern name of *gregale*, the "Greek wind," drove S. Paul on to its shores and brought it about that the "chief man" of the island, Publius, became its first Bishop. It was a centre of civilization, as well as a centre of the religious life of the Western Mediterranean, very much earlier, for Malta, in the words of the lamented Sir Themistocles Zammit, "was the holy island of neolithic faith, the half-way house of the early mariners, who trusted themselves to their frail wooden craft, full of hope in a protecting power."

Later, when we emerge from prehistory, we find the position reversed: Malta, instead of extending supernatural protection to peoples beyond its shores, comes under the political protection of others. During the many centuries of its recorded history Malta has had many rulers: the Phœnicians and their offspring, the Carthaginians, then Romans, Arabs, Normans, Angevins, Aragonese and Castilians, then for two and a half centuries the international Order of S. John of Jerusalem, and, finally, at the invitation of the Maltese people after a brief French occupation, the British. But despite the impact of such cosmopolitan influences this people has clung tenaciously to its ancient tongue, which is unquestionably of Semitic structure and has claims to descent from the speech of Dido and Hannibal.[1] It was, in fact, from a bilingual inscription in Phœnician and Greek found in Malta in 1697, of which more will be said in the following chapter, that the Phœnician alphabet was reconstructed. Of this inscription Dr A. V. Laferla writes in his *Story of Man in Malta*: "The construction and grammar . . . are identical with those of modern Maltese and many of the words (*lil*, *bin*, *tnejn*, *jisma*, *iberikom*) are still in use at the present day." S. Luke in the Acts describes the Maltese as "barbarians"—that is, as neither Greeks nor Romans—and

[1] The name Hannibal is still met with in Malta as a Christian name. Its Maltese diminutive is Nibblu.

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we may safely assume that S. Paul's Aramaic was as comprehensible to them as was their related Phœnician to him.

There seems to be no evidence that this Semitic speech of the Maltese "barbarians" had been replaced by some other language when the Arabs seized the Maltese islands in 870. Many of the philologists therefore hold that on to this Punic stock the Arabs grafted, during the two hundred and twenty years of their occupation, a vocabulary of contemporary Arabic which did not completely oust words of the older, kindred stratum. These scholars consider that the dialect received, in fact, a second, fresher infusion from the same reservoir and that the resulting blend is the core of the Maltese language of to-day.

Inevitably, in the course of ages, this language has borrowed words from the languages and dialects of the other countries with which Malta has been connected—from Sicilian, from Aragonese, from Italian, from French, even from English—but it has always fitted such words into its own Semitic framework, has governed them according to the rules of its own Semitic grammar and mechanics. Thus the Maltese who have emigrated to Syria and to the north coast of Africa have no difficulty in making themselves understood by their Arabic-speaking neighbours, who for their part can make themselves readily understood in Malta. Here is the Lord's Prayer in Maltese, which I quote so that the reader unfamiliar with the language may see for himself what it looks like:

Missierna li inti fis-smewwiet,
Jitqaddes ismek,
Tigi saltnatek,
Ikun li trid Int, kif fis-sema hekda fl-art.

Hobzna ta' kull jum aghtina l-lum,
Ahfrilna dnubietna, bhalma nahfru lil min hu hati ghalina.
U la ddahhalniex fit-tigrib,
Izda ehlisna mid-deni. Hekk ikun.

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CHAPTER XVIII

Old Survivals in Modern Malta

MALTA OCCUPIES A PLACE OF ITS OWN IN THE OLD WORLD not only by reason of the length and unusual character of its annals, not only by reason of the tremendous range of its architectural monuments. It does so because it combines with these features the circumstance that it is the home of a separate race, the smallest of European peoples.

There are, it is true, four independent states in Europe of lesser size than Malta, but the inhabitants of these states do not form distinct racial stocks, nor have they their own languages. The Maltese are the smallest nation with the longest history, and their islands are a microcosm, self-contained. Not only has Malta its own tongue. It has its own University—the oldest in the British Commonwealth Overseas and granted the Royal patronage and the prefix "Royal" by King George VI in his coronation year—with seven faculties: Theology, Laws, Medicine and Surgery, Dental Surgery, Engineering and Architecture, Arts, Science. It has, as we have seen, its own Nobility with their Committee of Privileges. It is an ecclesiastical Province whose Archbishop exercises jurisdiction since 1944 over the bishopric of Gozo, previously immediately subject to the Holy See since its formation in 1864. And in the history of this microcosm has been mirrored the life of the great world around it.

Viewed as a part of the British Commonwealth, Malta is unique in two particulars. It is the only British possession whose Government owns an Opera House and in normal times maintains an annual opera season and conducts the pawnbroking of the nation in the manner of certain Continental states.

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Gozo

Corniche from heights as inaccessible as nature and man's ingenuity could make them. When the marauders from North Africa ceased to be a menace, the citadel was partly evacuated for the lower town, but happily was never abandoned completely. Even now it contains the cathedral of the diocese and the Law Court and Public Registry, formerly the residence of the Governors of Gozo; and, although many of its ancient houses are in ruins, a few are still inhabited.

One interesting little lane with façades of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was restored by the Government before the outbreak of the Second World War, as has been the handsome Renaissance building facing the entrance to the citadel latterly known as the Bondi Palace, as related at the end of Chapter XIII. One of the houses in the lane at one time belonged, as an inscription testifies, to the soldier Bernard, "*miles Bernardus*," who was killed at the capture of the citadel by the Turks under Sinan Pasha in 1551. When he saw that the fortress could hold out no longer this dauntless man took the lives of his wife and two daughters with his own hand to save them from being sold into captivity, and then fell, fighting to the end. The walls and fortifications of the citadel are happily well preserved.

Gozo was Ogygia or Gaulos to the Greeks, *gaulos* (γαῦλος) being the word the Greeks had for the round merchant-boats of their rivals, the Phœnicians. From Gaulos it became Gaulum to the Romans, then appears on Idrisi's map of 1154 as Ghudash, and in modern Maltese is known as Ghawdex (pronounced Audesh), its Bishop signing as *Episcopus Gaudisiensis*. The shortest ferry-crossing between the two islands is only four miles, yet many Gozitans have never been to Malta while the overwhelming majority of Maltese have never been to Gozo.

The Gozitans are a frugal, thrifty, reserved, at times somewhat (yet not unpleasantly) dour people, who are regarded in Malta in much the same way as the Scots are